

first farm associated with a first farmer and a second farm associated with a second farmer;

a competition analyzer cooperating with the farm identifier to estimate profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;

an offer developer cooperating with the competition analyzer to determine possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and

a farm selector cooperating with the offer developer to select farms from the set of farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest.

18. (Once Amended) A method for selecting farms to grow a crop of interest comprising:

developing a set of farms capable of growing the crop of interest, the set of farms including a first farm associated with a first farmer and a second farm associated with a second farmer;

estimating profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;

determining possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and

selecting farms from the set of farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest.

19. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein selecting farms is based upon at least one of: the estimated profits developed by the offer developer, risk estimations associated with the farms in the set of farms, profit to be earned by an agricultural company, price to be charged

consumers, transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a loader; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to an elevator; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from an elevator to the predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a loader to the predefined location; aggregate economic profiles of elevators associated with the farms in the set of farms; and aggregate economic profiles of loaders associated with the farms in the set of farms.

20. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein developing the set of farms is performed by considering at least one of: elevator capability to handle the crop of interest, loader capability to handle the crop of interest, farm capability to grow the crop of interest, farm capability to grow a predefined quantity of the crop of interest, and farm capability to grow the crop of interest within a predetermined schedule.

21. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein developing the set of farms is performed by accessing a database.

26. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein developing the set of farms further comprises:
identifying elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest;
eliminating farms from the set of farms that are associated with only the elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest; and
eliminating farms that cannot grow the crop of interest from the set of farms.

27. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein estimating profits further comprises:

estimating a profit that a farm in the set of farms can expect to earn by growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and
selecting a most profitable crop for the farm from the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest.

28. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein determining possible offers further comprises:

estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farm of interest in the set of farms; and
developing a price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the estimated quantity of the crop of interest.

29. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 28 wherein determining possible offers further comprises:

identifying a risk factor associated with the farm of interest; and
adjusting the price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest based at least in part upon the risk factor.

30. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein selecting farms further comprises:

selecting a preferred set of farms from the set of farms based on at least one of: (i) a risk factor, (ii) an expected profit, and (iii) an expected quantity;
developing an aggregate economic profile for each elevator/loader associated with a farm in the preferred set of farms; and
selecting farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest based on the developed aggregate economic profiles and the quantity of the crop of interest to be grown .

31. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein estimating profits further comprises estimating the profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest based upon at least one current market price.

32. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein, for a farm in question associated with more than one elevator/loader, determining possible offers comprises determining the possible offer based upon the elevator/loader with a highest relative profit to be earned by the farm in question.

33. (Once Amended) A method as defined in claim 18 wherein determining possible offers is based in part upon at least one risk factor and profits to be earned by the farms in growing the crop of interest.

Please add the following new claims:

52. An apparatus for selecting farms to grow a crop of interest comprising:

a database;

a farm identifier in communication with the database to develop a set of farms capable of growing the crop of interest;

a competition analyzer cooperating with the farm identifier to estimate profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;

an offer developer cooperating with the competition analyzer to determine possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at

least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and

a farm selector cooperating with the offer developer to select farms from the set of farms to receive a contractual offer to grow the crop of interest.

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53. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the farm selector selects farms based upon at least one of: the estimated profits developed by the offer developer, risk estimations associated with the farms in the set of farms, profit to be earned by an agricultural company, price to be charged consumers, transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a loader; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to an elevator; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from an elevator to the predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a loader to the predefined location; aggregate economic profiles of elevators associated with the farms in the set of farms; and aggregate economic profiles of loaders associated with the farms in the set of farms.

54. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the farm identifier identifies the set of farms based upon at least one of: elevator capability to handle the crop of interest, loader capability to handle the crop of interest, farm capability to grow the crop of interest, farm capability to grow a predefined quantity of the crop of interest, and farm capability to grow the crop of interest within a predetermined schedule.

55. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the database comprises at least one of: (a) a product database containing data indicative of types of products that may be grown by a farm, (b) an elevator database

containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by an elevator; (c) a loader database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by a loader; (d) a product market database containing data indicative of sales prices of types of products; (e) a transportation market database containing data indicative of transportation costs for transporting goods between geographic locations; (f) a transportation database containing data indicative of types of transportation available for transporting a product from at least one of a farm, an elevator and a loader; and (g) a farm database containing data indicative of at least one of agronomic characteristics of a farm and geographic information concerning a farm.

56. An apparatus as defined in claim 55 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises an on-line database.

57. An apparatus as defined in claim 55 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises a local database.

58. An apparatus as defined in claim 56 wherein the on-line database comprises an on-line exchange.

59. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the farm identifier further comprises:

an elevator/loader discriminator for developing the set of farms by identifying elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest; and

a farm discriminator cooperating with the elevator/loader discriminator for developing the set of farms by eliminating farms that are associated with only elevators/loaders identified by the elevator/loader discriminator from the

set of farms and by eliminating farms that cannot grow the crop of interest from the set of farms.

60. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the competition analyzer further comprises:

a profit estimator for estimating a profit that a farm in the set of farms can expect to earn by growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and

a product selector cooperating with the profit estimator to select a most profitable crop for the farm from the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest.

61. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the offer developer further comprises:

a production estimator in communication with the database for estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farm of interest in the set of farms; and

a pricing engine cooperating with the production estimator to develop a price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest estimated by the production estimator.

62. An apparatus as defined in claim 61 wherein the offer developer further comprises a risk identifier in communication with the database for identifying a risk factor associated with the farm of interest, wherein the pricing engine develops the price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest estimated by the production estimator based at least in part upon the risk factor.

63. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 the farm selector further comprises:

a farm screener in communication with the database for selecting a preferred set of farms from the set of farms based on at least one of: (i) a risk factor, (ii) an expected profit, and (iii) an expected quantity;

an elevator/loader profiler for developing an aggregate economic profile for each elevator/loader associated with a farm in the preferred set of farmers; and

an elevator/loader selector for selecting farms to receive a contractual offer to grow the crop of interest based on the aggregate economic profiles developed by the elevator/loader profiler and the quantity of the crop of interest to be grown .

64. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the competition analyzer estimates the profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest based upon at least one current market price.

65. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein, for a farm in question associated with more than one elevator/loader, the offer developer determines the possible offer based upon the elevator/loader with a highest relative profit to be earned by the farm in question.

66. An apparatus as defined in claim 52 wherein the offer developer determines the possible offers based in part upon at least one risk factor and profits to be earned by the farms in growing the crop of interest.

67. An apparatus as defined in claim 53 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the elevators are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the elevators.

68. An apparatus as defined in claim 53 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the loaders are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the loaders.

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69. A method for selecting farms to grow a crop of interest comprising:

developing a set of farms capable of growing the crop of interest;
estimating profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;
determining possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and
selecting farms from the set of farms to receive a contractual offer to grow the crop of interest.

70. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein selecting farms is based upon at least one of: the estimated profits developed by the offer developer, risk estimations associated with the farms in the set of farms, profit to be earned by an agricultural company, price to be charged consumers, transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a loader; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to an elevator; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from an elevator to the predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a loader to the predefined location;

aggregate economic profiles of elevators associated with the farms in the set of farms; and aggregate economic profiles of loaders associated with the farms in the set of farms.

71. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein developing the set of farms is performed by considering at least one of: elevator capability to handle the crop of interest, loader capability to handle the crop of interest, farm capability to grow the crop of interest, farm capability to grow a predefined quantity of the crop of interest, and farm capability to grow the crop of interest within a predetermined schedule.

72. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein developing the set of farms is performed by accessing a database.

73. A method as defined in claim 72 wherein the database comprises at least one of: (a) a product database containing data indicative of types of products that may be grown by a farm, (b) an elevator database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by an elevator, (c) a loader database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by a loader; (d) a product market database containing data indicative of sales prices of types of products; (e) a transportation market database containing data indicative of transportation costs for transporting goods between geographic locations; (f) a transportation database containing data indicative of types of transportation available for transporting a product from at least one of a farm, an elevator and a loader; and (g) a farm database containing data indicative of at least one of agronomic characteristics of a farm and geographic information concerning a farm.

74. A method as defined in claim 72 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises an on-line database.

75. A method as defined in claim 72 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises a local database.

76. A method as defined in claim 74 wherein the on-line database comprises an on-line exchange.

77. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein developing the set of farms further comprises:

identifying elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest;
eliminating farms from the set of farms that are associated with only the elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest; and
eliminating farms that cannot grow the crop of interest from the set of farms.

78. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein estimating profits further comprises:

estimating a profit that a farm in the set of farms can expect to earn by growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and
selecting a most profitable crop for the farm from the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest.

79. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein determining possible offers further comprises:

estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farm of interest in the set of farms; and

developing a price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the estimated quantity of the crop of interest.

80. A method as defined in claim 79 wherein determining possible offers further comprises:

identifying a risk factor associated with the farm of interest; and
adjusting the price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest based at least in part upon the risk factor.

81. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein selecting farms further comprises:

selecting a preferred set of farms from the set of farms based on at least one of: (i) a risk factor, (ii) an expected profit, and (iii) an expected quantity;

developing an aggregate economic profile for each elevator/loader associated with a farm in the preferred set of farms; and

selecting farms to receive a contractual offer to grow the crop of interest based on the developed aggregate economic profiles and the quantity of the crop of interest to be grown .

82. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein estimating profits further comprises estimating the profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest based upon at least one current market price.

83. A method as defined in claim 69 wherein, for a farm in question associated with more than one elevator/loader, determining possible offers comprises determining the possible offer based upon the elevator/loader with a highest relative profit to be earned by the farm in question.